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SUBJECT: EMBASSY MINSK WEEKLY POL/ECON REPORT - July 06, 2007

¶1. The following are brief items of interest compiled by Embassy Minsk.

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##### International Relations

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#### ¶2. Iranian Military Delegation Comes to Belarus

On July 4, military officials from Iran, including Defense Minister Mostafa Mohammad Najjar, arrived in Minsk for talks with Belarus' Defense Ministry and to observe GOB military training.

#### ¶3. South Korean Trade Delegation in Minsk

On July 4, a delegation of representatives from the Korean Trade and Investment Promotion Agency (KTIPA) arrived in Belarus for a two-day visit of meetings with the GOB Council of Ministers, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Economics, and Industry, and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The meetings focused on trade and economic relations between South Korea and Belarus and the possibility of opening a KTIPA office in Minsk.

##### Civil Society

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#### 14. Opposition Youth Activists Get Jail Sentences

On July 4, youth opposition activists Ales Kalita and Pavel Seredenko received 15 and 10-day jail sentences respectively. A Minsk judge found them guilty of petty hooliganism under the Administrative Code after police officers testified the activists illegally distributed CDs and swore at the police. Authorities detained Kalita and Seredenko on July 3 at the opposition Belarusian Popular Front's (BPF) headquarters when the two activists rushed out to help their colleague Anastasiya Ozarko escape police. Ozarko maintained that when she was leaving the office two plainclothesmen approached her, accused her of theft, and started pulling her towards a car. Ozarko noted that when Kalita appeared at the court hearing he had an injured nose and sought medical assistance.

#### 15. Religious Activists Arrested

On July 4, police arrested 14 activists at a Roman Catholic festival in Budslaw who were circulating a petition that calls for changes to Belarus' Religion Law. Authorities held them for three hours and seized leaflets giving information about the petition campaign before releasing the activists without charges. The same day, the police in Minsk arrested six Protestants at an apartment and confiscated religious tracts. Authorities detained them at a local police department for several hours and released them later that day without charges.

#### 16. Opposition Challenges Demonstration Ban in Court

On June 28, the opposition Belarusian Party of Communists (BPC) chapter in the eastern city of Gomel filed an appeal against the authorities' ban on a demonstration scheduled for June 1 to protest cuts of social benefits. Earlier the activists attempted to challenge another authorities' decision not to sanction a rally in

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commemoration of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant blast; however, the judge denied an appeal on June 11. The city authorities have not allowed a single opposition demonstration in Gomel since the beginning of 2007 citing violations of law on mass events, but failing to provide any particular reasons for banning the demonstrations.

#### 17. Milinkevich's Campaign for EU Neighborhood Policy

On June 30, former opposition presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich's "For Freedom" movement started an information campaign about potential assistance that could be granted to Belarus under the EU's Neighborhood Policy if the government began implementing principles of democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights. Activists will distribute leaflets in public places with information about the benefits of rapprochement with the EU. Milinkevich reiterated that the campaign "is highly important and necessary on the way to the future partnership of Belarus with the family of European nations." He also added that despite what state propaganda alleges, "Belarus is welcome in the EU, and the EU will welcome democratic changes in Belarus".

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#### Domestic Economy

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#### 18. Belarus' Internal Debt Up 1.2 Percent

On July 4, the GOB Finance Ministry reported that Belarus' internal debt increased 1.2 percent on the month in May to USD 2.2 billion, an inflation-adjusted increase of 9.1 percent through January-May. Of this, GOB long-term debt accounted for 56.4 percent, short-term debt for 19.5 percent, and debt secured by the GOB for 24.1 percent.

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#### International Trade and Investment

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#### ¶9. GOB Forecasts USD 870 Dollar Trade Deficit

On June 29, Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Burya predicted a foreign trade deficit of USD 870 million in the first half of 2007 for Belarus due to a rise in imports that outpaces Belarus' rise in exports. He stated that dealing with this situation "will depend on the resolution of oil delivery issues, exports of refined oil and utilization of refineries' capacities." This announcement comes after a commodity trade deficit of USD 1.2 billion for Belarus in the first quarter of 2007.

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Quote of the Week  
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¶10. On June 26, President Lukashenko offered the following praise to GOB prosecutors on the 85th anniversary of the founding of Belarus' Prosecutor's Office:

During its existence, the Belarusian Prosecutor's Office has become a secure foothold for the presidential power in overcoming illegal processes, enforcing public security, rule of law, and stability. Your professionalism and high moral standards underpin faith of people in rule of law and in justice.

Stewart